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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 001088

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA'S JOINT MECHANISM: DEBATES OVER THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES RAGE ON

REF: COLOMBO 01052

Classified By: AMB J. LUNSTEAD FOR REASONS 1.4(b) and (d)

¶11. (SBU) Summary. Political parties and citizens continue to debate the Joint Mechanism (JM) for tsunami relief, and although the President continues to express her determination to go forward with the JM, she has not yet done so. Various parties are criticizing the JM, and the longer she waits to sign it, the longer these opponents will have to quibble with segments of it and to turn public sentiment against it. Members of other parties and journalists have already noted this trend. End summary.

¶12. (SBU) Although the President has not yet released the official text of the Joint Mechanism (JM) for tsunami aid distribution, she continues to make public statements to try to garner support for it. However, she still faces opposition, not just from the former coalition partner Janathi Vimukthi Peremuna (JVP), who left the coalition over the JM, but also from other parties. Press reports indicate that anti LTTE Tamil United Liberal Front (TULF) leader Ananda Sangaree strongly opposes the JM because he believes it legitimizes the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) by giving it a role in distributing aid.

¶13. (C) Media reports also indicate that the Opposition's United National Party (UNP) leader Ranil Wickremesinghe told members of the pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance (TNA) that both the president and a representative of the LTTE should sign the Joint Mechanism (JM) for tsunami relief distribution before the document is forwarded to the House for discussion in Parliament. In a discussion with pol FSN, TNA Member of Parliament (MP) Gajen Ponnambalam confirmed that report. He added that the president does not have full support within her own party, but she should exert her executive authority rather than relying on Parliament. On June 20 United National Party (UNP) MP G.L. Peiris told the Ambassador that if the President does bring the JM as an adjournment motion before Parliament, the ensuing debate will be highly divisive and unproductive.

¶14. (C) According to Ponnambalam, the TNA sees the JM as an essential precursor to the peace process. LTTE political leader Thamilchelvan is also cited in the media as saying that the JM is an important confidence-building measure that may help ease the path of the peace process. Thamilchelvan is due to meet with the Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen, who began a five day visit on June 20. Helgesen will also meet Wickremesinghe, MPs from the TNA, and Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) MP Rauf Hakeem. The press reports that Helgesen will assist in final decisions on the JM. The LTTE has stated in the press that it wants the World Bank to be entrusted with the aid rather than the Sri Lankan Ministry of Finance.

¶15. (C) Comment. In attempting to convince people to support the mechanism, the President has actually opened the debate wider. She has tried to reassure the public that the JM is an administrative structure and that the LTTE has recognized government primacy by agreeing to the JM. The LTTE's insistence that the aid be administered through the World Bank may be an attempt to respond with an assertion of independence. The longer the JM remains in the public eye without actually being signed, it is subject to criticism from all sides and the slimmer its chances for success become. At this point the President has nothing to lose by signing the JM; she has already lost her majority in Parliament.

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